

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T KINSHASA 2760

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BRUSSELS FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINS CG
SUBJ: SHABA INVASION: CONSULTATIONS WITH BELGIANS AND FRENCH

1. SUMMARY: BELGIAN AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS HERE AGREE THAT, IN VIEW OF FAZ WEAKNESS AND REPORTED FALL OF MUTSHATSHA, MILITARY PROSPECTS IN SHABA ARE DIM. THEY ALSO AGREE THAT MOBUTU'S POLITICAL POSITION HAS BECOME MORE PRECARIOUS. NEVERTHELESS, FRENCH POSITION AS KNOWN HERE IS TO MAINTAIN FULL SUPPORT FOR MOBUTU; BELGIAN POSITION APPEARS MORE MABIGUOUS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN MEETING TODAY WITH BELGIAN AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS, BOTH AGREED THAT FALL OF MUTSHATSHA WILL HAVE SERIOUS NEGATIVE EFFECT ON ALREADY POOR MILITARY PROSPECTS FOR FAZ IN SHABA. BELGIAN SAID THAT, BASED ON REPORTS RECEIVED FURING PAST FEW DAYS, HIS ASSESSMENT OF FAZ CAPABILITIES HAD BECOME MUCH MORE NEGATIVE. FRENCH AMBASSADOR, WHO UNTIL NOW HAS BEEN MUCH MORE OPTIMISTIC, CONCURS, OPINING THAT "FIFTY KATANGAN GENDARMES COULD PROBABLY TAKE KOLWEZI" GIVEN PRESENT INDICATION OF FAZ PERFORMANCE. WE ALL AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT DEFENSE OF KOLWEZI WAS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO SURVIVAL OF MOBUTU REGIME.

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3. BELGIAN SAID TO HIS KNOWLEDGE THIRD AIRCRAFT SHIPMENT OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT NOW EN ROUTE WAS ALL THAT GOB PLANS TO SEND, AT LEAST FOR TIME BEING. FRENCH AMB PROFESSED TO BE LESS SURE OF HIS GOVT'S PLANS, DECLINING TO REVEAL ANY DECISIONS IN THIS AREA THAT MAY HAVE BEEN MADE AS RESULT OF JOURNIAC VISIT HERE.

4. BOTH BELGIAN AND FRENCH SAID THEY HAD NO CONFIRMATION OF MERCENARIES ALREADY IN SHABA OR ON THE WAY. BOTH, HOWEVER, THOUGHT IT WAS PERFECTLY POSSIBLE, IF NOT LIKELY, THAT GOZ WAS ALREADY RECRUITING MERCENARIES "VIA PRIVATE CHANNELS." NETIERH WAS SANGUINE THAT MERCENARIES ALONE COULD SAVE THE SITUATION IN SHABA. THEY WERE WILL AWARE OF SERIOUS NEGATIVE IMPACT MERCENARIES COULD HAVE ON WESTERN EFFORTS TO HELP MOBUTU REGIME, PARTICULARLY IN US.

5. IN DISCUSSING KATANGANS' TACTICS, WE ALL AGREED THAT POSSIBLE SCENARIO WOULD BE MERELY TO POSE SUFFICIENT THREAT TO KOLWEZI IN HOPES THAT FAZ WOULD BREAK AND RUN. AT SAME TIME, KATANGANS MIGHT OFFER ASSURANCE OF SAFETY FOR BELGIANS AND OTHERS AT KOLWEZI IN NAME OF KEEPING COPPER PRODUCTION GOING FOR GOOD OF THE COUNTRY. BELGIAN SAID SUCH A PLOY WOULD BE MOST DIFFICULT FOR GOB TO HANDLE. HE NOTED THERE WAS GREAT PRESSURE FROM BELGIAN COPPER INTERESTS TO MAINTAIN PRODUCTION AT ALL COSTS, AND THAT MANY AMONG BELGIANS WORKING AT KOLWEZI SEEMED AMENABLE TO STAYING ON UNDER KATANGAN CONTROL.

6. BELGIAN AMB CITED KATANGAN TRACTS RECENTLY DISTRIBUTED IN KOLWEZI STATING THEIR INTENTION TO ESTABLISH "PROVISIONAL CAPITAL" IN KOLWEZI. HE SAID WHILE LARGE BELGIAN COMMUNITY THERE REMAINED IN PLACE, IT HAD BEEN FORESEEN THAT FALL OF MUTSHATSHA WOULD TRIGGER ACTIVE PHASE OF EVACUATION PLANNING. HE WAS NOT AWARE, HOWEVER, THAT ANY ACTIVITY ALONG THIS LINE HAD YET BEEN STARTED.

7. FRENCH AMB SAID JOURNIAC MET TWICE WITH MOBUTU DURING HIS BRIEF VISIT HERE. BOTH TIMES HE FOUND MOBUTU SURPRISINGLY CALM
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DESPITE DEPRESSING PERFORMANCE BY FAZ, WHICH MOBUTU CANDIDLY ADMITTED. (I, TOO, WAS STRUCK BY MOBUTU'S SERENITY DURING OUR MEETING YESTERDAY.) IN RESPONSE TO QUERY RE JOURNIAC'S CONCLUSIONS, FRENCH AMB SAID ONLY THAT GOZ WOULD CONTINUE TO GIVE FULL SUPPORT TO MOBUTU IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE.

8. ON POLITICAL SIDE, WE ALL AGREED THAT SHABA DEVELOPMENTS PLACED MOBUTU IN INCREASINGLY PRECARIOUS POSITION. BELGIAN NOTED EVIDENT INCREASE IN OPEN TALK OF OPPOSITION TO MOBUTU AMONG MANY ELEMENTS IN KINSHASA, INCLUDING ELITE ASSOCIATED WITH HIS REGIME. NONE OF US HAD ANY INDICATION OF ALTERNATIVE LEADERS PREPARING TO TAKE OVER, EITHER BY FORCE OR BY ARRANGMENT WITH THE PRESIDENT.

9. RE DIPLOMATIC EFFORT, WE AGREED IT WAS PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT THAT KATANGANS HAD MOVED ON MUTSHATSHA AFTER ANGOLANS HAD TOLD NIGERIANS THEY WOULD WAIT UNTIL THIS WEEKEND TO GIVE DEFINITIVE RESPONSE TO APPEAL FOR MEDIATION. EVEN CONTROL OF MUTSHATSHA WOULD GIVE KATANGANS CONSIDERABLE ADDED ADVANTAGE IN MAKING POLITICAL DEMANDS OF KINSHASA.

10. COMMENT: FRENCH AMB IS EXCEPTIONALLY DISCREET INDIVIDUAL AND IS SUSPECT THERE WAS MUCH MORE TO JOURNIAC VISIT THAN HE HAS INDICATED, INCLUDING MERCENARY PLANS. IN THIS CONNECTION, BELGIAN SAID HE HAD INDICATION, BUT NO CONFIRMATION WHATSOEVER, THAT GOZ WAS CONSIDERING APPEAL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN PERSONNEL, WHICH WE ALL AGREED WOULD BE A DISASTER. GENERAL CONCLUSION WE ALL SEEMED TO REACH WAS THAT FAZ MILITARY SITUATION IN SHABA WAS RAPIDLY REACHING POINT OF NO RETURN AND THAT THIS POSED MOST SEVERE IMPLICATIONS FOR MOBUTU'S POLITICAL SURVIVAL. EXCEPT FOR QUICK RESULTS ON DIPLOMATIC FRONT, NEITHER OF MY COLLEAGUES HAD ANY BRIGHT IDEAS AS TO HOW THIS COULD BE AVOIDED.
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